Information for private foster carers

If you are thinking of looking after someone else's child and providing accommodation in your own home, you, the child's parent or anyone else involved in making this arrangement, should contact us before the child arrives. We can advise you and support you to plan for the child's stay. This applies to a child under 16 years of age (18 years of age if the child is disabled), who is not a close relative, and is staying for 28 days or longer. This is private fostering.

You need to tell us at least six weeks before the proposed arrangement starts. If it is an emergency arrangement, tell us immediately. You will need to complete our form 'Notification of private fostering arrangements, declaration to privately foster children and permission to request information', or ring your local office which provides services for children and young people (see below).

Why should we be made aware of private fostering arrangements?

Safeguarding the child

Privately fostering a child is always a big responsibility, and we have a duty to oversee the arrangements to promote the welfare of the child and to ensure they are protected. It is important that the carer has a good understanding of the child's needs.

Providing support

Taking on the care of someone else's child is not often straightforward. Misunderstandings and conflicts can easily arise, even between friends. Living away from their parents for any length of time can present challenges to children and their carers, and we can support you all.

What you need to do

The law requires us to make sure the child will be safe and the arrangement is in their best interest. You will need to make sure that:
• the child's parents give you as much information as possible about the child, including children's routines, language, culture, contact with family, education, health, finance and support.
• the child is happy, healthy and safe and that their needs are met.
• you reach agreement with the parents about covering the costs of caring for the child and meeting their needs. The child's parents will have to make this payment. It is not the responsibility of the council.
• you tell your social worker about any changes to people in your household, if you move house or if the child leaves. Please use the form 'Notification of change in private fostering arrangements'.
• you tell us within 48 hours if the child leaves your care and provide us with the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child.

You may be able to claim tax credits or benefits such as Child Benefit, Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance; the Citizens Advice Bureau or the local Benefits Agency Office will be able to advise you. Please see our separate leaflet.

What Children and Young People's Services must do

It's our duty to make sure the child is safe and well looked after. We work with and help parents and private foster carers to make sure arrangements are legal and safe. We have to make sure an arrangement is in the child's best interest. Within seven days of receiving notification of a private fostering arrangement, a social worker will arrange to visit you and the child. The social worker will
gather information about you and all members of the household, and inspect your accommodation. You will be asked to make a declaration about circumstances that may bar you from being a private foster carer. You, and all members of your household over 16 years, will be asked to apply for an enhanced disclosure from the criminal records bureau.

We will make a full assessment. An assessment is only about a particular arrangement. It is not an assessment of your general suitability as a private foster carer. We can impose restrictions and/or requirements on you at any time eg the number of children that you can privately foster, or taking safety measures in your home. We can prohibit the arrangement or disqualify you from being a private foster carer. We'll do this if it is best for the child, but you can appeal to a court if you think we are wrong.

The assessment includes:

- Criminal records and health check for you
- Similar checks for members of your household aged over 16
- Making sure your home is safe
- Making sure that you have all the information you need to care for the child
- Making sure that the arrangement is for an agreed and limited time

When private fostering is agreed we will continue to offer support and guidance to all involved to make sure the arrangement works successfully. We will do this by regularly visiting you and the child whilst they are living with you, including making unannounced visits, and visiting or keeping in touch with the child's parents. Parents, carers and the child involved can ask for assistance and support to deal with any difficulties. You will have access to the private fostering support and training group.

We will:

- Help you work together with the child's parents
- Help you to get the services and information you may need to meet the needs of the child
- Help you agree the support needed to care for the child
- Discuss arrangements alone with the child if the child is old enough
- Discuss arrangements with the child's parents
- Discuss with you any arrangements that they, you or we feel are not satisfactory
- Notify other agencies of the arrangements and consult with other agencies to obtain information on the child

For more information, contact the Children and Young People's Services office for the area where the child is living or will be living:

**Bristol North** 0117 903 8700
**Bristol East/Central** 0117 903 6500
**Bristol South, Symes (near Hartcliffe)** 0117 353 2200
**Bristol South, Broadwalk (near Knowle)** 0117 903 1414

Email: childprotection@bristol.gov.uk
www.bristol.gov.uk/privatefostering

If you would like this information in a different format, for example, Braille, audio CD, large print, electronic, BSL DVD or community languages, please contact 0117 9037788.

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